

Enoch Powell: the New Right (1970) - Tom Nairn



An assessment of Powell's patriotism and racism and its influence within the politics of his time.

Enoch Powell's anti-immigration and pro-repatriation 'rivers of blood' speech of April 1968 made him the figurehead of populist patriotic, racist views of that era. Fifty years later, in the shadow of Brexit and the rise of another New Right, we can see familiar themes and resentments reappearing in modern populism; immigration, minority scapegoating and a recurring crisis of post-empire national identity.

Quote:

"The notorious figure of Enoch Powell is the subject of universal opprobrium on the Left in Britain. Denunciations of him have often limited themselves, however, to a moral rejection of his racism. ... Tom Nairn seeks to locate Powell's ideology within the total structure of English bourgeois politics, and to isolate its symptomatic importance. He shows that Powell is a much more conscious and ambitious reactionary than is sometimes believed. His apparently peripheral position within the two-party consensus conceals his central role in displacing the whole parameters of this system to the Right. Besides its directly intoxicating impact on the petty bourgeoisie and sections of the working class, Powellism indirectly has shifted the bourgeois parliamentary system itself, including both Labour and Conservative Parties, in his direction." (Introduction to New Left Review no. 61, May-June 1970, in which the article appeared.)

* * *

Quote:

Every nation, to live healthily and to live happily, needs a patriotism. Britain today, after all the changes of the last decades, needs a new kind of patriotism and is feeling its way towards it ...
Enoch Powell, Speech at Louth, 1963.

Enoch Powell: the New Right

In certain respects, the Right Honourable John Enoch Powell has long seemed the most original of Britain's bourgeois politicians — a figure whose every speech is awaited with eager interest and anxiety, who may be adored or hated but is universally felt to be important. Powell represents something new in British politics. If this something new is also something very old—nevertheless, in the present situation its impact, meaning, and possible results are all novel. Powell rose to this

doubtful eminence mainly on the impact of his celebrated Birmingham address of April 20th, 1968. This was the speech in which he met 'a quite ordinary working man' who suddenly told him 'If I had the money to go, I wouldn't stay in this country . . . In this country in 15 or 20 years time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man.' After a scarifying catalogue of further such revelations, Powell concluded: 'As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to the River Tiber foaming with much blood'. The message was that Britain's s coloured immigrant population does indeed present a mortal threat to the British (or rather, to the *English* — for he pointed out 'that in practice only England is concerned') and must be got to return home from whence they came. As Powell has modestly stated himself, 'the speech provoked a polical furore without precedent since the end of the war'.

Naturally, he came to be regarded as the champion and chief spokesman of the various racist and anti-immigrant movements. He has also been widely accused of inconsistency (vis-a-vis his earlier statements on the issue) and of rabid demagoguery.[1] However, both the inconsistencies (which Powell of course presents as the natural evolution of his views) and the blatant demagoguery serve a deeper, and perfectly consistent, purpose. This underlying purpose has been obscured by too narrow a concentration on the question of race and immigration. The narrow focus itself serves Powell's purpose very well, by turning what is really only a right-wing tactic into an obsession for left-wing and liberal opponents — while in fact, there are wider and far more dangerous trends at work. Referring back to England's last bout of immigration-mania, against the Jewish immigrants of the period 1890-1905, Paul Foot remarks that in 1970 'all that has changed is that new scapegoats must be found for the homelessness, the bad hospital conditions, and the overcrowded schools . . . '[2] But in reality, though England's coloured population has of course become a scapegoat for capitalism's ills, very much more has changed than the scapegoat itself. Powell knows this. Indeed, it is his sense of these profounder historical changes which supplies the real bite to his attack on the immigration question. The 'New Right' he represents is rooted in such changes, as both symptom and aggravation of the historical decline of English conservatism, and so must be regarded in longer historical perspective.

I. The Old English

Quote:

*From Guilsboro' to Northampton, all the way
Under a full red August moon, I wandered down ... Yet the air
Seemed thronged and teeming, as if hosts
Of living presences were everywhere;
And I imagined they were ghosts
Of the old English, who by tower and spire,
Wherever priest and sexton's spade
In church or graveyard round about the shire
Their unremembered bones had laid,
Now in the warm still night arising, filled
The broad air with their company,
And hovering in the fields that once they tilled,
Brooded on England's destiny.
(Enoch Powell, Poem XXVI, Dancer's End, 1951; written 1940-45)*

Powell's basic concern is with England and the — as he sees it — half-submerged nationalism of the English. His real aspiration is to redefine this national identity in terms appropriate to the times — and in particular, appropriate to the end of empire. England's destiny was once an imperial one; now it has to be something else. Powell is not really sure what it is. But he feels that he, Enoch Powell, carries some intimation of it within his own breast, and he has consistently striven to construe this sense of fate.

In 1964, speaking to the Royal Society of St. George,[3] 'he returned to the theme of the 'old English': 'There was this deep, this providential difference between our empire and others, that the nationhood of the mother country remained unaltered through it all, almost unconscious of the strange fantastic structure built around her . . . England underwent no organic change as the mistress of a world empire. So the continuity of her existence was unbroken . . . Thus, our generation is like one which comes home again from years of distant wandering. We discover affinities with earlier generations of English, who feel no country but this to be their own. . . We find ourselves once more akin to the old English.. . . From brass and stone, from line and effigy their eyes look out at us, and we gaze into them, as if we would win some answer from their inscrutable silence. "Tell us what it is that binds us together; show us the clue that leads through a thousand years; whisper to us the secret of this charmed life of England, that we may in our time know how to hold it fast." What would we say...?'

In 1964, when the post-war Conservative regime ended, Powell still did not know what they would say. Twenty years of brooding on England's destiny had availed him little. By April 1968 the ancestors had, finally, said something: approximately, 'Go home, wogs, and leave us in peace!' This prodigious clue to a thousand years of history has, however, a meaning beyond its absurd manifest content. For the dilemma to which it appeals is a real one. It is quite true that the English need to rediscover who and what they are, to re-invent an identity of some sort better than the battered cliché-ridden hulk which the retreating tide of imperialism has left them—and true also (for reasons described below) that the politics of the last 20 years have been entirely futile in this respect. Powell's recipe for the growing vacuum is the — at first sight — incredible patchwork of nostrums expounded in his recent speeches: economic laissez-faire, Little England, social discipline, trade before aid, loyalty to Ulster, and racism. But no critique of such incoherence can afford to ignore the need upon which it works: in relationship to reality, it may possess a driving-force which it lacks when considered simply as a set of ideas. After all, very few past Conservative heroes have been noticeably 'coherent' in this sense: compared to those of Churchill, Joseph Chamberlain, or Disraeli, Powell's career so far is an epitome of logical sobriety. Only in the context of the twilight conservatism of the 1960's does his cynical opportunism appear startling, or even unusual. British conservatism has always been profoundly 'illogical' since the time of Edmund Burke, by an instinct rooted in the great historical conditions of its existence. It has been only too happy to rule, and leave logic to the 'opposition'.

The odd ingredients of Powellism are held and fused together by a romantic nationalism with quite distinctive cultural origins. Powell worked his way up from the lower middle-class (both parents were elementary school teachers) via a Birmingham grammar school to Cambridge. Thus early in life this solitary and rigid bourgeois industriously acquired the traditional culture of the English ruling elite: Greek and Latin. He became Professor of Greek at the University of Sydney at the age of 26, a remarkable tribute to ungentlemanly energy and self-discipline.[4] At the same time, he wrote verse in an appropriately archaic romantic mode derived mainly from A. E. Housman and the Georgians. The theme is usually death, or else the passing of youth, innocence, and love:

Quote:

*Oh, sweet it is, where grass is deep
And swifts are overhead,
To lie and watch the clouds, and weep
For friends already dead.[5]*

These wholly sentimental reveries and sighing dramas tend to go on in the rustic English limbo first popularized by Housman:

*I dreamt I was in England
And heard the cuckoo call,
And watched an English summer*

*From spring to latest fall,
And understood it all...
And I lay there in England
Beneath a broad yew-tree,
Contented there to be.[6]*

This tradition of abstract upper-class kitsch arose in the same epoch which witnessed England's attempt at the Higher Imperialism, the Boer War, the Syndicalist Revolt, the Constitutional Crisis of 1911, and the Aliens Act.⁷ It gives sublime expression to the hopelessly *rentier* mentality into which a large part of the English intelligentsia had now lapsed, to the despair of militarists like Lord Roberts, imperial administrators like Curzon and Milner, national-efficiency zealots like Sidney Webb, and such 'committed' intellectuals of the day as Rudyard Kipling and Henry Rider Haggard. As if knowing instinctively how impossible it would prove to save British imperialism from its own ramshackle self, the poets turned towards a safer past. This movement of involution led them — in a pattern which has also characterized other intellectual trends of the English 20th-century — to a conservative dream-world founded on an insular vein of English romanticism. Powell revelled in it. It never occurred to him that this week-end landscape was far more synthetic than the most plastic products of Hollywood.

'Ours is an age when the engines of bad taste possess great force,' he declared in his Inaugural Lecture at Sydney in 1938, 'With rare exceptions, the cinema, the newspaper and the wireless tend powerfully to promote vulgarity, by day and by night in our cities the eye and the ear are continually assaulted by objects of bad taste . . . I once heard Housman, when referring in a lecture to a certain corrupt epithet in Lucretius, remark that "a modern poet, I suppose, might write such a phrase as that and fancy that it was good, but Lucretius could never have done so". The words echo in my mind today; and whenever

I have achieved a daring adjective in a poem "and fancy that it is good", my conscience asks me whether Lucretius and Housman would have thought the same or not. That illustrates exactly what I mean by the cultivation of taste.. . .'[8]

It goes without saying that he mastered the techniques of Georgianism, and produced suitably 'tasteful' rhymes. The same Prussian assiduity which took him to the Sydney Chair saw to that. Later in life, he even learned to fox-hunt, and penned a Housmanesque jingle on this important political experience. With this background, it was quite natural that the 'old English' should materialize to Powell primarily 'by tower or spire' or in old country churches — rather than, say, in a sooty Wolverhampton cemetery or the ruins of a factory. He still partially inhabits this Disney-like English world where the Saxon ploughs his fields and the sun sets to strains by Vaughan Williams.

This is, in fact, a romantic nationalism which retains nothing of the original energy of either romanticism or nationalism. In England, a country of ancient and settled nationality, romanticism did not serve as the instrument of national liberation, it could not help forge a new national-popular consciousness. It could not even function as substitute for a real national being and consciousness — as, for instance, it did in Scotland. All too easily, it turned into an escapist or conservative dream-world, negating the Victorian bourgeois regime at one level only to confirm it at another. By the time of Housman and the Georgians it has become a sickly parody of itself, expressive only of the historic stalemate into which the English bourgeoisie was falling. Powell's poetic nationalism, in turn, is nothing but a pallid echo of the parody, incongruously surviving into the later 20th century.

However, the very absurdity and archaism of this re-heated romanticism poses a problem. If English nationalism can still be identified with such inadequate symbols, it is because of an odd weakness at its heart. The saccharine countryside of the Old English is a reflection of something persistently missing, something absent from English national identity itself. In part, this void is clearly associated with the positive and distracting presence of something else, for so long: English imperialism.

2. The Imperial Crown

Quote:

*Still the black narrow band of shimmering road,
A thousand miles the same ...
. . . Then on the Eastern hand
The skyline suddenly fell sheer away
And showed the smoky Delta; to the right
Rose sharp and blue against the desert's brown
The pyramids; and to our astonished sight
Descried, above it all, the Imperial Crown.
(Enoch Powell, Poem XXXIII, Dancer's End)*

Powell was once the most passionate of imperialists. When he left Sydney for the Indian Army at the outbreak of war, India burst upon him like a revelation.[9] He admitted recently: 'I fell head over heels in love with India. If I'd gone there 100 years ago, I'd have left my bones there.' (*The Times*, Feb. 12th, 1968.) Here, surely, was the true sense and purpose of England's being. That the grandeur had been fatally undermined half a century previously, that England's imperialism was more and more of a theatrical charade, that the Imperial Crown was now held up by the dollar-sign — all this meant nothing. His enclosed imagination saw 'Edward the First, Plantagenet' as having held the imperial destiny in one hand already (in the 13th century):

Quote:

*The rod thou holdest in thy right
Is raised thy enemies to smite
And shatter their impuissant hate,
But in thy left already lies
The image of the earth and skies,
Foreboding universal power . . .
(Poem L, Dancer's End)*

But in this imperial fervour there lay a basic uncertainty, an ambiguity which marks every facet of English imperialist culture in the era from the 1870's — when England began to become self-consciously imperial — up to the evident decline of the 1920's and '30's. On the one hand, English imperialism could scarcely avoid the most soaring ambition: it possessed so much, and had dominated so much of the world for so long, that its power could not help looking 'universal'. Yet on the other, the English were always uneasily conscious of the great discrepancy between this appearance and the substance behind it.

The old days of informal, economic empire were over, in the teeth of German and French competition; yet England's 'empire' remained a heterogenous assemblage of units belonging to this bygone era, approximately held together by her navy. On one hand there was the boundless delirium of Rhodes and the music-hall: 'His Majesty rules over one continent, a hundred peninsulas, five hundred promontories, a thousand lakes, two thousand rivers and ten thousand islands. . . The Queen found the revenues of the Empire at £75 million; she left them at £225 million. . . The Empire to which Victoria acceded in 1837 covered one-sixth of the land of the world; that of King Edward covers nearly one fourth. The Union Jack has unfolded itself, so to speak, over two acres of new territory every time the clock has ticked since 1800. . . '[10] But on the other hand, the English universal power was incapable even of governing the British Isles, as the Irish proved every few years. The immensity was also empty. If the English had ever taken their imperial delusion seriously, it would have required the largest army in the world as well as their navy, a new and quite different English State, and a total reform of English society away from the lazy conservatism into which it subsided.

Whatever imperialist zealots like Kipling, Webb or Joseph Chamberlain said, there was never any real chance of such reform taking place. The great weight of English conservatism was against it. And if that were not enough, so was the pressure of the City of London, lender-in-chief to the world and — on the whole — happy with the slack old ways: there were as good profits to be had investing outside the English territorial 'empire' as inside it (in the USA or South America, for instance). The first issue of *The English Race* contained an appropriately vigorous article by the Duke of Gloucester on 'The Value of Pageantry'. There was, indeed, little behind the pompous pageantry of Edwardian imperialism which had not been there some decades before, when the governing philosophy had been that colonies were a political nuisance to be got rid of as soon as the march of Progress would allow. The hollowness sounds through the English imperialist mind in a thousand forms: in Rider Haggard's necrophilia, in Kipling's moments of gloomy doubt, in the self-pitying pessimism of Housman, in the sadness of Elgar, or in the gloomy cosmic truth of Forster's Marabar caves.

For Powell, however, it was all good as new a generation later. In this narrow, rigidly-focused sensibility, imperialism had joined forces with the English pastoral mode. He devoted his disciplined energy to crazy schemes for the retention of India by military force and, later, even to plans for its re-conquest when the Conservative Party came back to power in 1951.[11] This was, in fact, the main motive which had driven him into political life in the first place. The world was unthinkable without the British Empire. That is, Powell's imaginary world was unthinkable without it — the world where, now, Old English and grateful brown-skinned multitudes jostled bizarrely together.[12]

The unthinkable happened. Independence was conceded to India and Pakistan by the Labour government of 1945, and after 1951 it became clear that even under Churchill it would not be undone. Powell's fantasia was rudely jarred by the fact: it took him some years to recover from the blow. England's destiny had received a mortal wound.

When he did recover, it was by a familiar machinery of over-compensation. The most truly remarkable speech of Powell's career has not been on immigration, or the virtues of capitalism, or the social services which he administered for three years as a Minister in the Macmillan government, from 1960 to 1963. It was on the British Empire. It was delivered, not to an audience of ravening Conservative militants, but in the academic detachment of Trinity College, Dublin, and is easily the most interesting comment on imperialism by a Conservative spokesman in this century — at least, since Joseph Chamberlain's famous 'Tariff Reform' address of 1903.[13]

'The life of nations' — he begins — 'no less than that of men is lived largely in the imagination.' Consequently, what really matters in national life is the nation's 'corporate imagination'. Within 'that mysterious composite being, the nation', nothing can be more important than 'the picture of its own nature, its past and future, its place among other nations in the world, which it carries in its imagination. The matter of this imagining is nearly all historical. . . .' The form of such imagining, however, is myth. The politician's task—as Plato stated in *The Republic*, that bible of the English elite—is to 'offer his people good myths and to save them from harmful myths'. And (the point is) the current myths of the English corporate imagination are bad ones. The most important of such myths is the delusion that 'Britain was once a great imperial power, which built up a mighty empire over generations and then . . . lost or gave it up'. It is only because of the presence of this pernicious myth that the English believe they are in decline: they imagine they once stood upon a great height, hence they cannot help feeling in the shade today. But the conclusion (and by implication the whole of British politics since around 1918) is as mistaken as the premise.

'The myth of the British Empire is one of the most extraordinary paradoxes in political history,' continues Powell. Everyone believes it existed, but it never did: 'Until very nearly the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria (1897) if you mentioned "the Empire" to a man in the street in London, he would

think you meant the United Kingdom, with its three capitals, London, Edinburgh and Dublin . . .'[14] But what of India, Powell's old love, a British political dependency since the 18th century? Easy: 'India is the exception which proves the rule'. Otherwise, 'imperialism' was largely invented by the Conservative government of 1895-1905, for narrowly political reasons ('because one could make stirring speeches about Empire without needing actually to alter anything') and the particular culprit was his own predecessor from the West Midlands, Joseph Chamberlain (then Colonial Secretary). 'And so it was' — he concludes — 'that just in the very last years when Britain's relationship with her overseas possessions could by any stretch of fiction be represented as imperial, the Conservative Party first, and then the British people, came to believe instinctively, implicitly, that they had an empire—a belief that was to colour their thoughts, emotions and actions for the next 70 years and to set a gulf between them and the rest of the world, the same gulf which exists between a man in the grip of a hallucination and those around him who do not share it.'

How familiar are these particular tones of disenchantment! In the 1950's the whole western world rang to them—the lugubrious ex-votaries of Stalin who, unable to bear what their idol had become, turned to denounce the god that had failed them. Powell reacted in the same way towards the political collapse of imperialism. Given that the failure, the disenchantment, had occurred, what was once the all-embracing, seductive truth *could* only be a tissue of lies. There is in Powell's anti-imperialism exactly that weird mixture of sharpened perception and utter lunacy which one finds in ex-communist tirades on communism.

It is true indeed that England's high imperial moment was largely compounded of myth and pretence, that Chamberlainism was a practical impossibility, and that the Conservative Party had a strong vested interest in the charade. It is also quite true that the experience has left a deep subjective mark upon English national consciousness and culture (as Powell's own previous career had made abundantly clear). But it is grotesque to suggest that there was, literally, 'nothing' behind the theatricality of Edwardian imperialism. The reality behind it was, of course, the varied nexus of economic relationships built up by English trade and industry since the 17th century, which had made the English Industrial Revolution possible in the first place, and then been enormously extended by England's manufacturing primacy. There was all too little relationship between this mainly economic reality and the new pretensions aroused by military challenge and the desire to emulate Germany. It was impossible to systematize the conglomeration into an 'empire' in the Roman, French or German sense, except in fantasy. Yet this does not signify that such economic power (a different, more 'informal' empire than any other in history till then) did not exist.

This is, however, precisely what Powell is driven to maintain. He can allow no degree of truth or reality whatever to the cause which disappointed him. After the imperial myth, the second most notorious legend still gripping England's imagination is that England was once 'the workshop of the world'. In truth, it never was: this is no more than the 'identical twin' to the empire myth, and 'the characteristics of British industry which are supposed today to account for loss of ground to other nations were just as evident in the Victorian hey-day, when Britain enjoyed the preponderant share of the world trade in manufactured goods.' The very words belie the intended meaning. If Britain enjoyed 'the preponderant share of world trade in manufactured goods' at that time, it could not possibly have been for any other reason than that she enjoyed a preponderancy in world manufacture, which is all that was meant by calling her the 'workshop of the world'.

England's decline into 'her own private hell' has been — consequently — a dream process, just as the myth of empire was 'our own private heaven'. To cure herself, all England need do is wake up: 'If Britain could free herself from the long servitude of her 70-year-old dreams, how much that now seems impossible might be within her power. But that is another story, which has not yet begun. . . .'

That was in 1964. One can scarcely resist the thought that, for Powell, the awakening must have begun at last, with his racist speech of April, 1968.

By May 1967, he already had some intimations. Referring with admiration to General de Gaulle (one of his heroes), he commented: 'The face which we see in de Gaulle's mirror is our own, and we had better look at it firmly and steadily . . . What sort of people do we think we are? We have been hovering over the answer for years . . . a nation of ditherers who refuse to make up our minds.' [15] After a brisk review of the 'schizophrenia' which has long characterized British policy (the Pound, 'peace-keeping', the growth fetish, and so on) he returned to the question: 'What sort of people do we think we are? The question waits for its answer. In psychiatry a sign of convalescence is what is called "insight" — when the patient begins to regain a self-knowledge hitherto rejected. . . . How is Britain to fulfil the Delphic command "Know thyself"? How can you and I and the Tory Party help in resolving the national dilemma, reuniting the split personality and banishing delusion?' The reply was still cloudy, though. Powell concluded somewhat feebly, not in the tones of the Delphi Oracle: 'The politician is a voice . . . We do not stand outside the nation's predicament: we are ourselves part of it. . . All we can do is to speak out what we feel, to try and identify and describe the contradictions, and the phobias which we see around us, in the hope that. . . we may wake a chord that will reverberate.' Less than a year later, the Oracle had spoken, and the chords had finally begun reverberating to his satisfaction. The intimations of destiny in the Powell ego had at last found national 'contradictions and phobias' to identify with. The English had begun to know themselves once more. In the obscene form of racism, English nationalism had been re-born.

3. The Settled View

Quote:

Conservatism is a settled view of the nature of human society in general and our own society in particular, which each succeeding generation does but re-express.

(Enoch Powell, 'Conservatism and the Social Services', The Political Quarterly, 1953)

English nationalism has been travestied by romanticism and confused by imperialism. But no account of its calvary would be complete which failed to perceive how it has also been weighed down by *conservatism*. The 'matter of its imagining' (in Powell's phrase) is almost wholly conservative. This is not a question of the political Conservative Party but of that profounder, ambient conservatism which has marked the structure of English society for several centuries. The English national identity sags with the accumulated weight of its symbols and traditions, and is in consequence perhaps the least *popular* nationalism of any major country except that other island, Japan. This is in fact why the nationalism of the English appears so 'dormant' and 'unaggressive' (as *The English Race* put it): simply because the 'people' had so little positive part in creating it, or have forgotten the part they did play. On the whole, they have been forced into the stereotype of the plucky servant who 'knows his place' and, when the trumpet sounds, fights with the best of them. The fact poses a grave problem to would-be leaders of English national revival. [16]

An unintentionally comic clue to the problem is provided by Powell's own history of England, *Biography of a Nation*. [17] The 'Introduction' is a familiar, puzzled rumination on the subject: 'There is no objective definition of what constitutes a nation. It is that which thinks it is a nation . . . self-consciousness is the essence of nationhood . . . National consciousness is a sense of difference from the rest of the world, of having something in common which is not shared beyond the limits of the nation . . . This phenomenon of national consciousness remains almost as mysterious as that of life in the individual organism . . . This living thing, mysterious in its origins and nature, is perhaps the most difficult subject of purely human enquiry . . .'; and so forth. But, turning from this Idealist prologue to the text, the inscrutable secret reveals itself at once as all too simple: the shallowest imaginable montage of school-book clichés, wholly concentrated around the conventional symbols of

conservative nationality (the Crown, Parliament, the Constitution, etc.). These are the unsurprising content of the national self-consciousness.

It is difficult to exaggerate the degree of Powell's symbol-fetishism. He literally worships every sacred icon of the great conservative past. Hence, for instance, his enraged opposition to the Royal Titles Bill of 1953, which did away with Elizabeth II's queenship of the Commonwealth. Faced with such desecration Powell was forced—to the dismay of his fellow-Conservatives in parliament—to identify himself with England's soul. Destiny had struck again: 'We in this House ... have a meaning only in so far as in our time and in our generation we represent great principles, great elements in our national being . . . Sometimes elements which are essential to the life, growth and existence of Britain seem for a time to be cast into shadow, and even destroyed. Yet in the past they have remained alive; they have survived; they have come to the surface again and . . . been the means of a great flowering which no-one had suspected. It is because I believe that, in a sense, for a brief moment, I represent and speak for an indispensable element in the British Constitution that I have spoken.' [18]

He was both right and (in a sense important for understanding his whole political line) quite wrong. In one respect he does indeed represent very well an indispensable feature of English Constitutionalism — its obsession with the safe, fossilized forms of past authority and legitimacy. Yet of course the obsession must never be given free rein: its whole point, in England's traditional consensus-politics, was its function as an instrument of adaptation, a way of absorbing and neutralizing *change*. When it becomes absolute, it becomes useless. But Powell has a taste for absolutes. His destiny-filled solitude often blinds him to the wider logic of the Party, and the historic cause, which he wishes to serve. Utterly devoted to English conservatism, he is nevertheless also driven by a blinkered fervour which is alien to its way of working. Hence — as on the occasion in question — he easily finds himself far to the right of political conservatism. By a revealing paradox, this ultra-English bigot is compelled to feel and act in the most surprisingly 'un-English' fashion — that is, in a fashion which contradicts the real essence of the conservative political hegemony.

The mainstream of English conservative consensus has always effectively captured or suppressed left-wing disruption. The left, painfully conscious of its own dilemma, has not noticed how conservatism also had to control the right. Now, a retrospective penumbra of false consciousness eliminates them both. Not only does it politely pretend that the conservative hegemony has survived without difficulty (a fact of English nature), and quietly bury the history of the left, like syndicalism, the workers' control movement, and the other forces beaten in the great defeat of 1926. With almost equal effect, it expunges the grisly history of the English right. Mosley (like the British Communist Party) serves merely to underline the message: 'extremism' and foreign ideas never find a toehold here. When, finally, nemesis returns in the shape of Powellism, England is convulsed with astonishment: is it possible to be 'English', and extreme?

Yet the miracle of this long-lived conservatism lies, after all, in one word: war. Modern English conservatism was forged out of its 22-year war against the French Revolution and Napoleon. This was no war of popular nationalism, having as its stake the casting of English society in a new form: it was the opposite, a patriotic war of counter-revolution which reinforced the conservative social structure, and channelled and moulded popular forces in a fashion which made society able to bear the immense stresses of industrialization. It aimed to eliminate the people from history as other than a subordinate force, and fathered precisely that non-popular nationalism which, now, Powellism is endeavouring to inject life into from the right.

In old age, the imperialist system erected on this original basis has received two massive infusions of vitality from the two farther patriotic wars of the 20th century. Official legends regale the reader with tearful accounts of the tragic economic 'sacrifices' and 'losses' of 1914-18 and 1939-45. In fact, the

First World War providentially saved Old England from collapse and civil war, and prepared the terrain for crushing the proletariat in 1926; while the Second World War furnished the perfect restorative, in the form of a victorious patriot drama where English conservatism could hardly avoid looking, and feeling, like a St. George with one shining foot on the Nazi dragon's tail. Fortunately, the feet of the USA and USSR were on its neck. In both wars, England was on the right side, pursuing her long-established strategy of alliance with US imperialism. It is true that the war effort of 1939-45 produced much more social egalitarianism in England than any other event in her recent history, enough to result in the electoral defeat of Churchill in 1945. Yet — paradoxically — it also contained the social upheaval more firmly than ever in a renewed 'national' ideology of unity, a sense of patriotic purpose and regeneration. Hence (given the Labour Party's subordination to these myths) it led inevitably to the stifling new conservatism of the 1950's and 1960's.

So Powell's inheritance as an English nationalist is a very strange one. This stale, romantic, middle-class nationalism has survived on the surrogates of imperialism and foreign war for nearly a century. It is at the same time curiously under-developed (or 'submerged') because of its conservative, non-popular nature, and a living anachronism in a Europe from which nationalism has begun to pass

away. How can it be made to live again?



4. The Logic of Prejudice

Quote:

The music sounded, and in my breast

The ghosts of my fathers arose from rest ...

Like the priests in Aida they danced on my head

And sang savage hymns to the gods that are dead. (Enoch Powell, Poem XIX, Casting Off, 1939)

England needs another war. This alone would recreate the peculiar spirit of her nationalism, rally her renegade intelligentsia (as in the 1930's), and reconcile the workers to their lot. Unfortunately, war of that sort — like her empire — is a lost cause. Her patriotic symbols are unlikely to receive any farther transfusions of blood. Nelson, Wellington, Haig and Churchill will — with any luck — never arise from rest to dance on our heads again.

The true-blue nationalist's dilemma is a serious one, therefore. His sacred traditions are visibly withering. There is a new generation which finds them meaningless, or comic. Even the school-teachers — once high-priests of national conservatism — are out on strike. When it is not an international bore, England has become an international joke: her only claim to distinction of any sort is a mainly anti-national pop culture and a (largely unmerited) reputation for *dolce vita*. How can England's silent majority be got to return to the fold, before it is too late?

War was the great social experience of England in this century — yet war served only to confirm and re-validate the value of the past, to affirm the essential continuity of the national tradition. The only new experience, going sharply counter to tradition, has been that of the coloured immigration of the 1950's and '60's. Hence, as Powell realized, it has become possible to define Englishness vis-a-vis this internal 'enemy', this 'foreign body' in our own streets. This is exactly what he tried to do in the speech of April, 1968. It was more than a case of locating a new scapegoat: this scapegoat was to have the honour of restoring a popular content to English national self-consciousness, of stirring the English 'corporate imagination' into life once more, by providing a concrete way of focussing its vague but powerful sense of superiority.

How strong the force is which Powell began to tap in this way has been demonstrated by the rapid series of rightward steps which the Establishment took to deal with it. At each successive phase of the racial storm in the 1960's, more strict immigration controls were imposed. Writing in *Crossbow*, the organ of 'liberal' young Conservatism, N. Scott remarks that these were no more than fearful 'reactions to public opinion' which 'rendered respectable racially-prejudiced reactions to fears of unemployment and over-population'. But the same writer can only end his plea for tolerance and 'constructive race relations' by conjuring up precisely the phoney, old-style nationalism which Powellism goes beyond: 'Intolerance and racialism present Britain with a challenge to the values upon which life in these islands have been built . . . It is not, I hope, unfashionably nationalistic to recall Milton's words: "Let not England forget her precedence of teaching nations how to live".[19] The fact is, that intolerance and racialism did *not* present any challenge to national values, as long as (like military violence) they were comfortably located abroad; located at home, they represent a new situation to which rhetoric of this kind is irrelevant. As for the Miltonian precedent, it embodies very well a bourgeois moral high-mindedness which the English masses have never been particularly fond of. Their sense of superiority does not need them to pose as ethical models to an admiring universe.[20]

Six months after his April, 1968, speech, Powell told the London Rotary Club (enjoying a week-end in all-white Eastbourne) that his words had 'revealed a deep and dangerous gulf in the nation . . . a gulf between the overwhelming majority of people throughout the country on the one side, and on the other side a tiny majority with a monopoly hold upon the channels of communication, who seem determined . . . not to face realities'.[21] The populist intention is unmistakable: the new national spirit

is of and for the overwhelmingly and decently prejudiced majority of English men and women, opposed by the 'aberrant reason' of a tiny minority who think they know best (and which actually included, as Powell knew very well, most members of both parliamentary parties and virtually the whole politico-cultural elite of conservative England).

In another sense, however, England's coloured minority is not such a fruitful choice for the New Right. It is quite a good scapegoat, and served to achieve a preliminary mobilization of popular sentiment in the right direction. Yet there are inescapable limits to its farther development. In this way, the English coloured population contrasts oddly with the traditional victim of European right-wing nationalism, the Jews. It is, in fact, almost entirely proletarian in character, and unlikely to be anything else for some time to come—hence, it is impossible to pretend plausibly (as one could with the Jews) that it *is* the oppressive 'tiny minority', or at least is in league with it. England's Indians and West Indians can scarcely be identified with 'the system' by which the majority feels obscurely oppressed. They do not measure up to the task of re-defining England's destiny, as it were. In addition, they present the defect of being geographically concentrated in a few areas (whereas it hardly mattered where the Jews were, since they could so easily be imagined as everywhere). Above all, it should not be overlooked how vital immigrant labour has become to the British economy, as to the other West European economies, as Andre Gorz shows elsewhere in these pages. The Confederation of British Industries itself has always opposed restrictions on immigration and talk of repatriation.

Powell tried to extend the area and effect of the racial storm-area, first by his 'repatriation' proposals (offering himself, with characteristic moral integrity, as future Minister of Repatriation), and then by his new fantasy of a burgeoning, prolifically fertile coloured horde forcing the — evidently dried-up — native stock off the island altogether. But these did not repeat his initial shock-success. The new destiny was not emerging with the hoped-for speed. He turned to Ireland.

He showed evidence of stirring interest in England's most ancient problem only a week after the Londonderry riots of 1969. A letter of elevated moral tone appeared in *The Times* in August, rebuking the British Army commander in Ulster, General Freeland, for his 'political' comments during the crisis. Then in February 1970, Powell addressed an Ulster Unionist rally at Enniskillen. He declared that 'The ultimate fact in human society, and in the world of states and nations, is belonging or not belonging . . . The belonging of Northern Ireland and the not-belonging of the Republic are at present obscured by the condition of the law . . . The fiction of the Ireland Act, 1949, must go . . . (and) . . . the entry, the residence, the settlement and the franchise of the citizen of the Republic of Ireland will have to be determined exactly as those of a Frenchman, a Russian or an Australian are determined . . . Nothing, in my judgement, would conduce so much to banish strife and disorder as the plain and open assertion, in legal and constitutional terms, that the people of these countries belong, uniquely and solely, to the United Kingdom and are part and parcel of this nation, which is in process of defining and recognizing itself anew. . . .'[22]

This statement was made (it must be remembered) in a situation again approaching civil war, where a British army was supposedly 'keeping order' and in fact maintaining the Protestant police-state of Northern Ireland, because the Catholic 'people of these counties' objected with their lives to 'belonging' to this vestigial limb of Anglo-Scots imperialism. Not surprisingly, Powell 'received a standing ovation from the audience'. The Rev. Paisley and his Calvinist desperadoes had just been welcomed into England's destiny.

But to build destiny on such a basis is even more desperate than anti-coloured racism. If England was ready to risk civil war for Protestant Ireland in 1914, it was because of the Empire and imperial prestige. Since these have disappeared, it will be somewhat difficult to turn Ulster into a popular cause again. Paisley and Major Chichester-Clark are not ideal heroes for the new national self-

recognition. It might be possible to whip up some anti-Irish (or even some anti-Scots or anti-Welsh) feeling, given the right worsening conditions in any of these places, but this would not carry the national soul far either. It needs more serious fodder.

In English conditions, therefore, the logic of prejudice has its limits. Beyond race and Ireland, what would the main *social* content of the revived national mind be?

5. The Oak Tree's Roots

Quote:

*'Often, when I am kneeling down in church,
I think to myself how much we should thank
God, the Holy Ghost, for the gift of capitalism'.
(Enoch Powell, quoted in T. E. Utley.)[23]*

Powell has indicated clearly what England's social future should be, in any number of perorations: 'Whatever else the Conservative Party stands for, unless — I am not afraid of the word — it is the party of capitalism, then it has no function in the contemporary world, then it has nothing to say to modern Britain. . . .'[24]

The capitalist market-place is another of the traditional fetishes Powell worships with total devotion, alongside the Crown and the Constitution. His view is a curious inversion of Fabian Socialism: the Webbs identified socialism with State ownership, control, and planning, while he identifies any form of State economic intervention (except currency issue and control) with 'socialism'. He cannot forgive his own party its corruption by 'socialism' in this sense. The modern Conservative Party has become a party of the State, it tolerates or even favours State power and bureaucracy almost as much as Labour. Powell even occasionally compares this State power to fascism: it represents, he claims, the true threat to our freedom — the inhumane, corporative dominance from above, from which only capitalism can preserve us. Hence, England must return as far as possible to the conditions of *laissez-faire*.

Two aspects of this odd rhetoric go some way to making it comprehensible, and help distinguish it from the ancient, over-familiar Conservative ideology of 'free enterprise' (a pedal which the Tories have had to lean on heavily ever since the Liberal Party died off, and they found themselves the main industrialists' party). Firstly, Powell's diatribes are not so much defences of the 'free market' as envenomed attacks on the mainstream of political consensus: the 'State power' against which he inveighs is no less than the tacit basis of agreement informing English political life, which (as always in the past) enables the two-party system to function smoothly and guarantees the peaceful evolution which is supposed to be the essence of English Constitutionalism. The slogan of 'laissez-faire' is the only economic one which distances his position sufficiently from the prevailing 'bad myths'. And, naturally, it appeals to at least one sector of the 'people' he is trying to galvanize into political life — the small business-man (still important in the West Midlands he represents) or the small *rentier* who feels oppressed and helpless in the face of today's great concentrations of economic power. This petty bourgeoisie is, after all, part of that historically absent or repressed English populism remarked on above — part of the historical 'people' kept in social servitude by the conservative hegemony.

Secondly, Powell's conception of the *laissez-faire* economy emphatically does not signify a *weak* or merely marginal State power — the State of classical English liberalism which was meant to do no more than 'hold the ring' for competing economic forces. Given what has happened in the past, a modern free-enterprise State must be *strong* (if only to cope with the much greater strength of business and financial organization today). Hence, Powell's economics are more compatible than they seem with his evident authoritarianism. The 'freedom' which his capitalist State would foster includes,

quite logically, the 'repeal of the Trade Disputes Act of 1906'.^[25] No less naturally, it includes repression of student agitation and of such infamous national scandals as the school-teachers' strike of 1969-70. To let capitalism off the leash again in the way Powell envisages would need, in fact, the strongest State action against workers, students, and intellectuals (the 'tiny minority who control communications', etc.) And obviously this face of Powellism appeals to an even wider stratum of discontented middle-class and lower-middle-class natives, like the Conservative Party militants he travels the country addressing.

Both these facets of Powell's ideology are very much the daily bread of nationalist, right-wing reaction in the past. They represent no more than the classical formula established succinctly by Charles Maurras long ago : 'Authority at the top, liberty below'.^[26] If the nation is ill and led astray, then it follows that the prevailing political force must be corrupt and incompetent. It cannot be cleansed or put to rights except by a strong, decisive leadership able to express the true national will. By definition, the nation is always being betrayed. It must, therefore, be *redeemed*.

Powell has always been riveted by the notion of the national destiny re-emerging from betrayal and ruin. One of his early poems is about the Portuguese national poet Camoes (Camoens), who was shipwrecked in the Mekong Delta in the 16th century:

Quote:

*Black the mountains of Timor
Sweeping from the sea
Watched Camoens drift ashore,
Rags and misery ...*

But the poet was to be saved from death, to compose the great national epic *Os Lusíadas*, and even in the depths of his degradation held in one battered hand 'a jointed fennel-stalk' —

Quote:

*Hidden in that hollow rod
Slept, like heavenly flame
Titan-stolen from a god,
Lusitania's flame.*^[27]

In 1953, amid the humiliation of the Royal Titles Bill, he imagined 'a great flowering' that might still come forth from destruction. In 1964, at the Royal Society of St. George, he compared England to Greece: 'Herodotus relates how the Athenians, returning to their city after it had been sacked and burned by Xerxes . . . were astonished to find, alive and flourishing in the midst of the blackened ruins, the sacred olive tree, the native symbol of their country. So we today at the heart of a vanished empire, amid the fragments of demolished glory, seem to find, like one of her own oak trees, standing and growing, the sap still rising from her ancient roots to meet the spring, England herself . . .'. Even now England must not despair: in spite of Heath, Wilson, and the Rolling Stones — 'we know not what branches yet that wonderful tree will have the power to put forth.'

In spite of all these classical features of right-wing destiny-mongering, however, Powellism still contains a glaring weakness at its heart: a far too overt identification with capitalism. This may appeal to capitalists, and particularly small entrepreneurs, but there is evidently a far larger area of the national soul to which it will never appeal at all. Most successful past brands of reaction have at least had the sense to conceal their links with capital from the public gaze. Powellism, by contrast, has its trousers down from the start: capitalism is nudely exposed as another cherished institution of Old England. When reminded by J. K. Galbraith at a Cambridge University Union debate that 'the competitive system was now an illusion, that the market was dominated by large monopolistic or

semi-monopolistic concerns which have many of the attributes of the State and which . . . create rather than obey public taste,' Powell merely admitted that there was, indeed, much truth in this statement.[28] He knows perfectly well that his *apologia* for capitalist freedom are in practice justifications of existing, large-scale finance-capital.

It is all very well to say that 'capitalism is now the revolutionary cause', as Powell does. The English masses are not likely to see their destiny there — on the contrary. What odd naiveté is it that prevents Powell from perceiving the vital necessity to any counter-revolution of disguising its true nature, of pretending to be some kind of revolt against capitalism? As regards the prejudices Powellism works on, its power is (as we noticed) limited. Now, in its central social doctrine, it seems to present an inexplicable weakness, and to be manifestly incapable of furnishing the void of English nationalism. Why is this?

6. English Authoritarianism

Quote:

*Oh that this dull necessity
And mastering force of sanity,
This too strong texture of the mind
That keeps me by its toils confined
In the world's badness,
Would break at last and set me free
Into the sunlit, halcyon sea
Of madness.
(Enoch Powell, Poem XXI, Dancer's End)*

The central problem of Powellism arises mainly from asking the wrong questions about the phenomenon — from considering Powell, his Conservative Party backwoodsmen, and his potential mass following as a tendency, or even a movement. Then one must ask what this movement may tend towards, and the question of 'fascism' inevitably arises.

Nothing could obscure the real issues more. In England, even the home-grown fascism of Mosley or the National Front is largely a distraction. The genuine right — and the genuine threat it represents — are of quite a different character. One of the few things in politics that may be confidently predicted is that J. Enoch Powell will never lead a column of blue-shirts into Parliament Square.

The ideological weaknesses and absurdities of Powellism matter little, simple because *in itself* it probably tends towards nothing at all. It is not, and probably never will be, a 'movement' in that sense. However, unlike English fascism, it is certainly not a distraction. It is, on the contrary, directly linked to and expressive of profounder changes of the utmost gravity. Intellectually — or in terms of the history of right-wing ideas — Powell may be negligible. This does not remove his political significance in the least.

Powellism is a symptom: the true threat lies in the developing disease of which it is a symptom. Powell has emerged apparently as an active challenge to the existing political consensus from the right. In fact, he and his repercussions are symptomatic of the growing paralysis and deterioration of the consensus itself. There *is* a national insanity in the air, but it did not originate in Powell's second-rate ruminations. It is located squarely in the mainstream of English politics and — beyond that — in the harsh contradictions of English capitalism which the political consensus has been struggling with in vain for a quarter of a century.

Powell — as we saw — attributes the chronic crisis and historical loss of nerve of the English governing class to *consciousness*. It has fallen foul of unfortunate myths, and acquired a false self-

consciousness — whence its dithering, its narcissistic isolation from reality, its feeble losing battle against economic crisis. The truth is the opposite. The continuity of England's incredible myth-consciousness, and her political decay, are the products of a material history — the shrinking material basis of an imperialist order still trapped in its own historical contradictions. And Powellism, the would-be trumpet-blast to cleanse the national mind, is only a belated echo of this decline. Its importance is precisely, that it enables us to perceive just how advanced the rot has become.

Powell's pathetic nationalist demagoguery can reverberate only within this peculiar environment of decay and isolation. Somewhat earlier in the history of his nation he would have passed unnoticed, an obscure classicist and political conformist glumly turning over his own garden. Yet now this fossil epitome of Old England looms across the national scene, a mushrooming caricature of patriotic destiny. European nationalism generally is in poor shape in 1970. But England has become culturally and politically isolated, imprisoned within her dying imperialism, and here this archaic development can still have an impact. It can work upon the submerged nationalism of the English, trying at least to give a reactionary content to its uncertainty, and appeal to the (perfectly justified) national feeling of frustration and anger. Because this feeling is so inarticulate, and so divorced from the genteel clichés of the Establishment, the New Right can, at least, suggest convincingly that something is profoundly wrong and that something must be done about it, in a partly familiar idiom.

Yet what purchase it has is due to the fissure which has, slowly, opened up in the traditional mode of hegemony. The political Establishment has begun to lose its old grip on the nation, and on the masses. It has — so to speak — started to shrink out of contact with the social realities over which, traditionally, it exerted an all-embracing and conservative control. It is only from this new fissure in the socio-political structure that the stale fungus of Powellism has been able to sprout, so rapidly and with such effect. Where else could such mothballed platitudes resound so strongly, where else could fusty junk like Powell's produce quite such a sensation? Where, but in the stagnant, involuted atmosphere of a world near the end of its tether?

Because the political consensus lies within the area of rot, Powell understood intuitively from his solitude that it was necessary to go beyond and outside it, although it took him many years of groping to discover the way. Then, the new phenomenon of domestic racism — outside the grip of traditional hegemony *because* novel — suddenly disclosed the fracture which he needed. His destiny-fantasy at once acquired some leverage upon reality. This particular social problem has (as we noticed above) limits of exploitability, as does the Irish question to which Powell has now turned. But both are, nevertheless, deep running sores which the present English body politic can probably no longer cure. By thrusting a knife into them, Powell can quickly aggravate the patient's general condition; he already has.

It goes without saying that Powell, wrapped as ever in his conservative fetishism, does this in the hope of re-injecting life into the old political machine. He piously imagines that his words will send fresh red blood racing through the arteries of Westminster. It has probably never occurred to him that these aged organs may not be able to take the strain. He has often remarked, in his usual awed fashion, upon the amazing continuity which has characterized English political life in the past. He believes he is part of this continuity, engaged on giving it the new national basis it needs. It has never crossed his mind that he might be killing it. Yet there can be little doubt that this is the meaning of the astonishing spectacle that has begun to unfold itself: in Powellism, the English conservative Establishment has begun to destroy itself. Its secular hegemony has come to this: a solitary figure, solemnly and self-consciously identified with every fibre of the glorious past, who is nevertheless compelled to devour the patrimony he worships. His importance — and his seriousness as a phenomenon and as a political figure — is not intrinsic, but rather in his relationship to this wider process. It lies in his function as a ferment of disaggregation within a deeper contradictory movement.

It is the logic of this movement that has carried him to where he is, and forced him to destroy his own idols.

To the left, absorbed in its own problems and the effect it is (or is not) having upon the social order, it comes as a surprise that this order should have begun to collapse in a different direction altogether. Now that Powellism has happened, however, the lines of force leading towards this result at least become more clear.

They radiate out from the underlying situation of stalemate, or irresolvable contradiction, in which British capitalism has been lodged since early in the century. This is not the place to try and analyse at length the main causes and features of the condition, or to distinguish specifically British traits from those which have also affected other capitalist States. In essence, the 'disease' is no more than the peculiar nature of British imperialism, or the complex of foreign and financial interests which the bourgeoisie acquired in its earlier development, which it preferred to the development of its domestic economy, and which — latterly — it has only been able to retain and develop *at the expense of* that economy. This contradiction has manifested itself in an 'economic crisis' lasting more than 20 years. It has become the near-exclusive concern of government in this period. Everything else has been made to depend on it. According to the time of year and the stage each politico-economic cycle has reached, the perennial British crisis is 'growing', 'grave', 'very grave', 'on the mend', 'looking up', 'turning the corner' or 'finally on the verge of solution'.

Throughout this period, both great political parties have accepted the same definition of the 'economic crisis', and struggled hopelessly to resolve it in the same ways (the Labour Party perhaps somewhat more consistently than the Conservatives). Since the definition was superficial and mythical (a genuinely 'bad myth' in Powell's sense) and the remedies were and are only palliatives, the result has been a staple political diet of boredom and irrelevance, incomprehensible to most of the population. For practical purposes, the national soul has been the Bank of England for two decades, and political life has been tied entirely to a number of economists' fetishes ('the Pound', the 'balance of payments', 'Britain's reserves', etc.) in the name of political realism and common sense. It is not surprising that the natives have become deeply, angrily, inarticulately restless.

What is surprising is that they have taken so long to react. During this era of decline and attrition, the political consensus has lost much of its earlier vitality. It was not designed for conditions like these — the two-party system and the English constitutional machine assumed their contemporary form, in fact, within the successful economic empire whose remains they have been wrestling to defend. Then it ensured mass adhesion and averted class conflict in much easier circumstances. In the last ditch where the political Establishment has now been labouring for so long, it has shrunk into a parody of its former self. Originally it functioned by securing a consensus around great national ideas and policies; since there have been no such ideas since 1945, it has had simply to avoid social conflict at any cost. 'Consensus' has become something like paralysis.

It is in this feeble, palsied world that Powellism can arise and produce its effect — it refuses to play the (debased) 'game' of consensus politics, and actively stirs up conflict instead of conspiring to stifle or ignore it. Talk of Powellite 'fascism' or of 'Tory counter-revolution' wilfully ignores the real conditions under which Powell and racism obtained their remarkable leverage over the system. The fact is, that there has been no 'revolution' to provoke the wave of reaction. It is true that at the same time as Powell has emerged there has been the beginnings of a challenge from the left: the nascent student movement, People's Democracy in Northern Ireland, and a rising tide of strikes. Yet these are no more than premonitory rumblings. They have not amounted so far to anything like the degree of social and political conflict which many other societies take completely for granted. Foreign visitors currently

confront the bewildering sight of a 'law and order' campaign by the press, the media, and both political parties, in a society where (except for Northern Ireland) there is scarcely any lawlessness or disorder.

The point is, precisely, that Powellism has arisen and acquired its influence, and the political Establishment has moved effortlessly rightwards in response to that influence, *without* real provocation. The Labour Party is not only mainly responsible for the political paralysis and degeneration of the last years; it has also lost most of the stimulus which once came from its own left wing. As the New Right has grown up, the Old Left has dwindled away and ceased to function within the consensus. All that the system has been able to do is debate endlessly over mechanical remedies to the problem: 'bringing Parliament closer to the people' by revising the machinery of government, by appointing an 'Ombudsman', by televising parliamentary debates, and so on.

If this is so, and the English system drifts into a feeble authoritarianism without much pretext, then what will happen when it is provoked?

So far, most of the provocation has come from it, as it has moved nervously towards more definite control over wages and the suppression of unofficial strikes. What will happen when the first large-scale factory occupation takes place? What will happen when the first effective worker-student alliance is formed? When one or other of the parties does finally pass anti-strike legislation, and embark on a more direct confrontation with the working class? What if any of these things should coincide with a further deterioration of the Northern Ireland situation, or with race-riots in England? What if they should cause, or accompany, a drastic down-turn of the perennial economic crisis, with the inevitable flight from sterling, loss of confidence, threat of devaluation, etc? None of these things is impossible. Any combination of them would, of course, presage a major upheaval in England.

In other words, when there is finally a real social conflict to test the political structure, how will that structure react? There is no point in making alarmist prophecies. But, with reference to Powellism, it is not in the least alarmist to indicate that this new right wing reflects (and derives its strength from) a general rightward degeneration of the political structure. It would be absurd to talk about an English fascism. But there is nothing absurd in remembering that in England, where there is no tradition of Caesarism, no domestic militarism, and no French or German-style army to incarnate national destiny, no reactionary regime could possibly neglect or overlook those priceless symbols of nationhood, Westminster, the Crown, and the Constitution.

Whatever the party in office, Powell has already demonstrated that he can pull the whole of the official structure of British politics in his direction. In a real crisis the impact of the new right would necessarily be qualitatively greater, whatever the formal political complexion of the Government. If the party system itself were strained by such a crisis, as is at least probable, then there is a ready-made formula to hand. National ideologies of reaction are very diverse. They seize upon and jumble up the materials to hand, with a logic which itself arises from the nation's history. The indigenous variety of authoritarianism, which has already occupied two decades of British political life in this century, is thoroughly established: in the longer-run, we might witness a National Government once again, which saves traditional values in the teeth of crisis. In this respect, Powellism may only be a preliminary ground-clearing exercise. Whatever political edifice would house English reaction, the furniture would doubtless still be that of British 'sanity'.

* * *

FOOTNOTES

1] These charges are described and re-affirmed in Paul Foot's study *The Rise of Enoch Powell: An Examination of Enoch Powell's Attitude to Immigration and Race* (Penguin 1969), which also contains the relevant facts on the immigration issue up to 1969.

2] In this period, noted Elie Halevy, 'An unmistakable wave of anti-semitism came over public opinion . . . The Act of 1900 against usury was perhaps the first symptom . . . The (Conservative) Cabinet had succeeded in finding a question on which the working classes were naturally protectionist.' The culmination (then as now!) was the Aliens Act of 1905 which — Halevy continues — 'was a complete reversal of the previous legislation, or rather absence of legislation . . . and the foundation stone of an entire edifice of anti-alien measures, which amounted in the end not merely to protection, but absolute prohibition'. (*History of the English People in the 19th Century*, vol. 5, III, II, 5)

3] This Society, unknown to most Englishmen, was founded in 1894 in the flood-tide of imperialist delirium. Its aim was aptly conveyed by the first number of its journal *The English Race*: 'There is some fear that the English stock is getting deficient in that healthy and legitimate egotism which is necessary to self- preservation . . . The Englishman must assert his indefeasible birthright.' *The English Race* was uncomfortably aware that the Scots, Irish and Welsh (to say nothing of real foreigners) seemed to have more national consciousness than Englishmen: 'Above all other racial elements in the British system, the English needs to be distinguished and preserved.' Each issue contained a 235-strong list of 'names to remember on April 23rd', ranging from Alfred the Great to William of Wykeham, patriotic poems and profiles, articles on such subjects as bell-ringing and Morris-dancing, and a thundering editorial, e.g. : 'Within the last century we English have absorbed an appreciable number of Scottish Celts and Saxons, Irish and Welsh Celts, and Jews . . . So far as the United Kingdom and the Empire are concerned, the knell of the pure-blooded Celtic race as a distinct element has sounded. The Celt will continue to undergo a process of gentle absorption, or share the fate of the aboriginals of America and New Zealand, the "Redskin" and Maori . . . The racial instinct of the English is ever-present, far down and deeply-rooted; too dormant, too unassertive, unaggressive yet uneradicable.' (Vol. II, No. 16, April 1913). In 1939, *The English Race* changed its title to *England*. By 1950 even St. George had gone from the cover, and (a parable of English imperial decline) it had dwindled into a genteel newsheet replete with pictures of thatched cottages and royalty, and appeals for funds. Powell's 1964 address is included in *Freedom and Reality* (Selected Speeches, ed. J. Wood, 1969). The reader's attention is drawn specially to the last section of the book, 'Myth and Reality', which Powell himself describes as the most important.

4] 'A distinguished scholar and churchman (remembers) . . . visiting the prodigy on his arrival at Trinity College, Cambridge. He found Powell, on a bitter November morning, in an attic room in New Court. There was no fire in the grate and Powell, covered in an overcoat and rugs, was reading Thucydides. His visitor asked him if he would care to come to tea; Powell simply replied "No". In a renewed effort to break the ice, his school friend sauntered across the room and lit a cigarette. "Please don't smoke," said Powell'. (T. E. Utley, *Enoch Powell: the Man and his Thinking*, 1968, p.48)

5] Poem XXIX, *First Poems* (1937)

6] Poem XV, *Dancer's End* (1951)

7] The first of the five volumes of *Georgian Poetry* (a collection of verse signalling the new 'Georgian' as distinct from the old 'Edwardian' era) appeared in 1912, with poems by Rupert Brooke, Graves, Masfield, W. H. Davies, Drinkwater, and Walter de la Mare.

8] *Greek in the University*, Inaugural Lecture to the University of Sydney, May 7th, 1938.

9] English political conservatism has always owed much to empire, and in particular to India. The most interesting statement of English conservative thought in the later 19th century, by that distinguished Victorian judge and bully James Fitzjames Stephen (*Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*, 1873), was also inspired by the author's Indian experiences. India, he wrote, was 'the best corrective

in existence to the fundamental fallacies of Liberalism'. Out there 'you see real government'. (See Introduction to the 1967 edition, the first since 1874, by R. J. White).

10] St. James Gazette, on the accession of Edward VII, January 1901, quoted in W. S. Adams, *Edwardian Heritage* (1949).

11] See Paul Foot, *op.cit.*, p.19.

12]

Quote:

*'The curse outstrips the wind
And on the shores of Ind
Takes form again.
A boat heaves to;
Out stretch ten swarthy hands,
And there the spectre stands ...
He turns with parted lips,
While graceful on his hips
The dark hands fall ...
(Poem XXVIII, Casting Off, 1939)*

13] Speech at Dublin, 1964, in *Freedom and Reality*, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

14] This is of course wildly inaccurate. As Richard Koebner's study of the introduction of terms like 'empire' and 'imperialism' into English usage shows, 'empire' was used in the early 1800's and 'imperialism' was perfectly familiar by the 1880's, both in more or less the modern sense. 'Imperialism' had made considerable inroads in the 1870's, in fact: Disraeli's first important imperialist speeches were in 1872, while Dilke's *Greater Britain* (which did much to popularize the imperial idea among the upper classes) came out first in 1868. See *Imperialism: the Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840-1960* (1964).

15] Speech at Hanwell, May 25th, 1967 (*Freedom and Reality*, *op. cit.*). De Gaulle had just administered another contemptuous rebuff to Britain's half-hearted desire to enter the Common Market, provoking near-universal resentment and wounded pride in Britain.

16] In this respect, the English right-wing dilemma is almost diametrically opposed to the American one. In America there is a popular, vividly-felt nationalism without a corresponding deeper structure of conservatism. Hence, for example, the recent American obsession with Edmund Burke, the founding father of modern English conservatism, and the interesting debate which surrounded and followed the publication of Russell Kirk's compendium *The Conservative Mind* in 1953 (see, eg. G. K. Lewis, 'The Metaphysics of Conservatism', *Western Political Quarterly*, vol. VI, and 'The Toryness of English Conservatism', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. I, No. I)

17] *Biography of a Nation: a Short History of Britain*, Enoch Powell and Angus Maude, 1955.

18] Speech in the House of Commons, March 3rd, 1953. Powell has also contributed two farther volumes to the glory of the Constitution, *Great Parliamentary Occasions* (1960) or 'authentic glimpses into the past of Parliament', and *The House of Lords in the Middle Ages* (with K. Wallis, 1968), a history which devotes as much space as humanly possible to ritual and trivia — 'Every institution has a local habitation . . . the peculiarities of the place affect the behaviour and life-story of the institution itself. No scrap of information therefore about the place and arrangements of sitting of the institution .

. . . is to be despised . . . This is one advantage, at any rate, which a working member of such an institution has . . .'. The criterion of selection of Powell's 'great Parliamentary occasions' is the 'pedantic devotion' which the Englishman accords tradition: 'With almost incredulous delight we find that . . . Humanity, as represented and revealed in Parliament, does not seem to change at all as the centuries pass.' Real history is of no significance. It will come as a surprise to most readers, for instance, that the only 'great occasion' of the 20th century was the debate over the revised Church of England Prayer-Book in 1927. But what mattered was the purely parliamentary drama it gave rise to. John Jones, a Labour member, objected to this trivial squabble 'on behalf of the great mass of the workers of this country (who) are more interested in the rent-book than the prayer-book'. Powell comments: 'The House of Commons, like a mediaeval court, has its licensed buffoons and tolerated jesters.' (pp. 117-18).

19] N. Scott, 'Constructive Race Relations', *Crossbow*, Jan.—March 1970. In fact, modern English nationality also preserves a kernel of older identity derived mainly from the 16th and 17th centuries, which there is not room to discuss properly here. It was associated with the experience of Puritanism and the 'Puritan Revolution' of 1660, and as a result—'English nationalism . . . has always been closer than any other nationalism to the religious matrix from which it rose . . . (to) a religious life and sentiment . . . full of social activism, of a feeling of responsibility for the betterment of the world'. (H. Kohn, 'The Genesis of English Nationalism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. I, No. 1, 1940) Taine's lengthy account of this national high-mindedness in his *History of English Literature* is still unsurpassed. This strictly bourgeois element of English national feeling is of course also represented in Powell-ism. Indeed, his reputation for personal high-mindedness is such that, at the time of the Profumo scandal — 'The entire country waited for some time in suspense for Powell's judgement on his leader (Macmillan). He was already known to be a man of exacting conscience — some said a puritanical conscience — who would have no truck with lechery and lying. His positive affirmation that Macmillan had not erred was a powerful reinforcement to the Prime Minister in his distress' (T. E. Utley, op. cit., p. 88). Some of Powell's populist appeal comes from the fact that such a morally impeccable source should tell the people their instincts are sound, and need not be restrained by a middle-class morality.

20] Speech at Eastbourne, November 16th, 1968 (*Freedom and Reality*, op. cit., p. 227).

21 *The Times*, February 9th, 1970. On the day after this address, Powell said on television that his declaration was only 'logical', and something that needed saying. It was not at all calculated 'to increase animosity between those of different religions'. The Conservative shadow Home Secretary Quintin Hogg commented afterwards that 'Logic was not, perhaps, the friend of good politics.'

22] op. cit., p.114

23] op. cit. p. 114.

24] *Freedom and Reality*, op. cit., p.10.

25] See *Freedom and Reality* ch. 10, 'Changing Trade Union Law', pp. 146-47. 'The evil of trade unionism', Powell states roundly, 'lies in the coercive power of combination which the trade unions possess, and which they use, either by threatening to withdraw their labour collectively or by actually doing so, in order to try to obtain more for their services than these would command in the open market without this coercion ...'

26] *Dictator and King* (1899), quoted in *The French Right* (selections ed. J. S. McClelland, 1970).

27] Poem VI, 'Os Lusíadas', *Dancer's End*.

28] See T. E. Utley, op. cit., pp. 117-29.